

## THE DUMP SHAFT

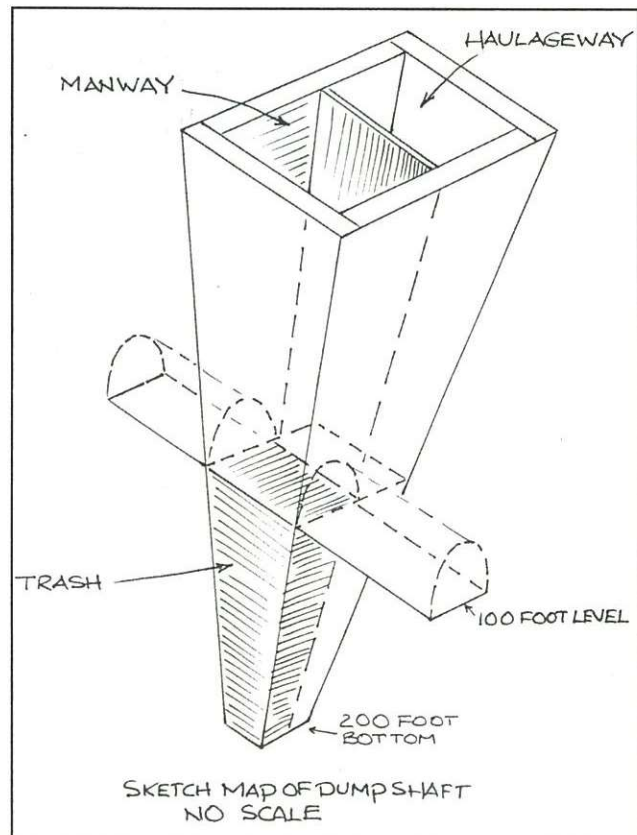
By Lane Griffin

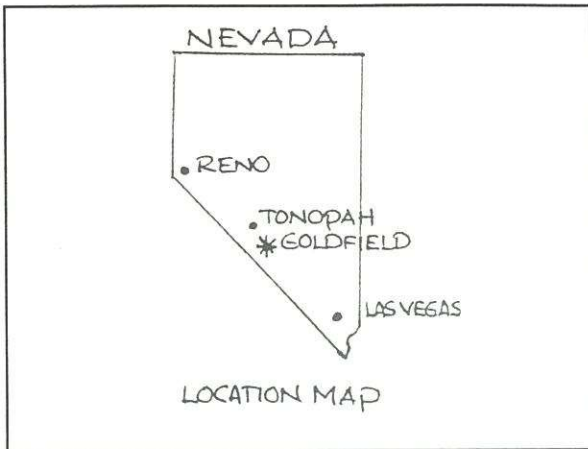
It was late in the day, we had examined the geology and underground workings of five mines already. My partner and I were mapping and sampling old mines in the heart of the Goldfield mining district as geologic consultants for a mining company. This part of the district is intensely altered, that is, what used to be volcanic rock is now a mass of soft clay. This would be the last shaft of the day, one of the many on the historic Mohawk claim and we anticipated a lot of uninspiring clay to map, especially since the high grade ore is exceptionally hard to distinguish underground. We used our high intensity light to examine the shaft before venturing into its depths. This appeared to be a two compartment mine, the shaft had been divided into two sections, one for the manway with ladders for access and the other, the haulageway, for transport of the ore bucket. The haulageway was open to approximately two hundred feet as determined by the rock drop method, but the manway was blocked about half way down. It was decided that the haulageway would provide us the best access and examination of the workings.

They were well timbered with square sets in good shape and a wooden curtain dividing the two sections so down I went. As is often the case there was debris in my way as I descended, so I carefully dismantled the wooden clothesline and sent the attached jeans sailing to the bottom, assuming they were recent additions from the residents of Goldfield or workers nearby. At the one hundred foot level of the shaft, I noticed

a small sublevel going two directions but only fifteen feet, so I decided to go all the way to the bottom. Slowly I made my way downward and as I did I was astounded by the amount of debris literally bulging out of the crevices in the wood that separated the two compartments. Was this recent junk or old treasure?

The wood lagging between the square sets obscured all rock rendering my geologic examination fruitless, so I decided to ascend to the sublevel at one hundred feet where rock was exposed along the horizontal workings. The rock was the usual altered volcanic so I noted its characteristics and



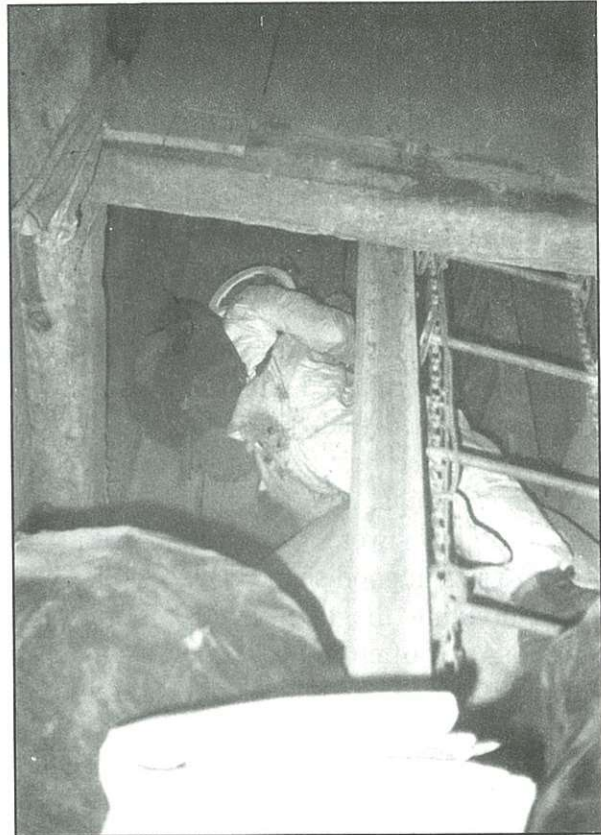


took chip samples then began to examine the trash I was standing in. Food cans, stationary, bottles and all manner of common trash was covering the sublevel and as my light illuminated the labels and the headlines of the newspapers, I began to slowly realize this was a subterranean treasure from just after the turn of the century. To stretch it a bit, the western version of King Tut's tomb of artifacts, an untouched accumulation of tons of old, very old trash. I took measure of where I stood atop the heap and approximately how far down it filled the manway compartment. I estimated one hundred feet to the bottom of an eight-foot by eight-foot shaft filled with very compacted trash. The was November of 1997, only until July of the next year would I know exactly what trash and treasures lay hidden in that dump shaft.

Careful research indicated that this particular mine was the Lynda-Mohawk located on the Mohawk 1 patented claim. We were able to contact the owner, and scheduled a meeting. Our plan was simple, rehabilitate the workings so access could be made safely and the artifacts retrieved efficiently, then mine the trash in a modified shrink-stope method. We would start at the

bottom and work up, dumping the trash in the haulageway downward and hoisting the treasures to the surface through the haulageway upward. The owner was all for it, especially since it was to result in the first royalty payments received since he owned these famous Goldfield claims.

Preparation for this unusual mining project was critical to success. New ladders had to be fabricated, personal protective equipment had to be purchased, and all safety issues had to be identified and surmounted. Our oxygen monitoring equipment had not noted any noxious gases and the oxygen level was within normal limits. Our biggest concern was the dust and particulate concentrations in a confined space,



Descending into the Haulageway

basically dirt and trash particles. We decided on using full face respirators with quick change filters, latex exam gloves covered by leather work gloves and full disposable body suits. We roped up when necessary and used the existing square sets for support whenever possible. As it turned out, we were well prepared for the task which was as we imagined— unbelievably dirty, dangerous, physically demanding and exciting.

We began at the bottom, two hundred feet below the shaft collar, looking upward, the entrance was a pinpoint of light. The trash was extremely compact because of the weight of the overlying material. This was beneficial because it was a competent coherent mass which allowed us to work underneath and stope out the goods without failure, but you almost had to drill and blast to loosen anything. The first ten feet gave us a glimpse of what the dump contained. Newspapers of all description mainly from Goldfield and California towns, but many were from the midwest and east coast. Mining journals and correspondence from as diverse locals as the Phillipines, Nicaragua and Mexico were found, but most abundant were papers from the Goldfield Consolidated Mining Company. Cans and bottles of all description, both broken (it was a two hundred foot fall) and surprisingly, intact. The most interesting items were clothing, jeans, shirts, hats, boots, many of them covered with candle wax. The condition of the items was excellent, the workings were completely dry and the fact that the haulage-way was not filled with trash allowed air circulation in a controlled environment. The trash was able to degrade in a slow, non-destructive manner, there was never any bad



The author in his element.

odor, liquid 'goo', nor any vermin or insects. The only bad factors were the damage during the fall, compaction from the overlying trash, and damage from the original garbage if it contained a liquid.

Grabbing handfuls of stuff, sorting through it and deciding what was trash or treasure was the basic procedure, but this created a constant atmosphere of dust and debris. Luckily, we had excellent masks and protective equipment so we were able to work for about three hours before our filters clogged up and exhaustion made us take a break. Trash would go into the haulage-way and the treasures would go into large rice sacks, to be hoisted out later. The magazines, newspapers and correspondence at the bottom were dated between 1907 and 1910 with the majority of the items from 1910. It was assumed that the items dated before 1910 were probably collected at one time and thrown away with the 1910 era trash. After going through the entire column of trash we found that the dump was probably started in 1910 and about two to four

feet of trash was dumped down the shaft every month ending approximately the first part of 1913. We were able to predict the dates of dumping so well that I estimated the position of trash for the spring of 1912. Climbing up to the estimated square set, while my partner worked below in 1910 material, I punched into the compartment and within five minutes pulled out a copy of the Goldfield Tribune, dated April 15, 1912, describing the sinking of the world's largest steamship and subsequent rescue of all passengers. I was, of course, looking at the report on the tragedy of the Titanic and found the article on coincidentally April 15, 1998. The tragedy on that day now is the titanic amount of income tax due, but that is another story.

We slowly worked our way upward doing our best to examine the dislodged trash as carefully as possible. This made work tedious but we were constantly reinforced by the discovery of interesting items, some of them exceptionally small such as political buttons and matchbooks. A zone of pharmacy items would be hit and suddenly labeled bottles from all the Goldfield pharmacies would be uncovered to our respirator muffled squeals of delight. Newspapers were ubiquitous, and as befitting a new mining camp, they were from all points on the compass, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, Salt Lake City and many other cities throughout the U.S. Nevada newspapers were primarily from Goldfield and Reno, but Searchlight and Las Vegas papers were also found. Food related cans and boxes were also discovered throughout the 'stratigraphic column' or should I say the 'shaftigraphic' column, in other words we found them from top to bottom. After re-

viewing the content of the cans we came to the conclusion that these guys ate very well. Oyster cans, Japanese crab meat, Louisiana shrimp cans, Russian caviar tins and all sorts of fruit and vegetable tins made one realize that this was indeed one of the richest mining camps in the world and with three railroads, had a selection of goods on par with any other large city in the west. After eating all this good food the citizens of Goldfield would have to clean their teeth, and we found evidence of these efforts as well. Tooth powder tins, mouth rinse bottles, toothbrushes and toothpaste containers were found in an abundance not usually thought of in a mining town. I have concluded that this dump contained trash from the managers and engineers at the Goldfield Consolidated Mines who were a little more preoccupied with hygiene than the ordinary miner.



Pioneer Milk Cans

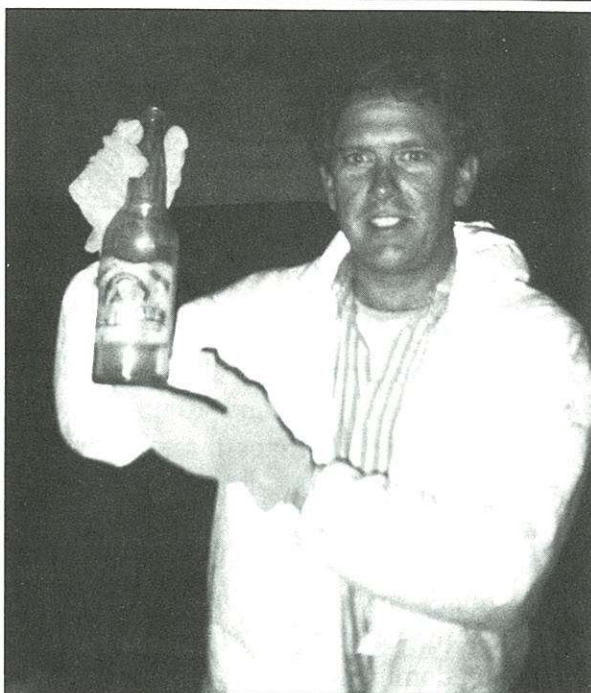
An extraordinary amount of the paper products were from the Goldfield Consolidated Mining Company and employees. Personnel time cards, production reports from the Jumbo, Red Top, Laguna and Mohawk mines, supply reports and requisition forms, company correspondence, maps and blueprints. Letters and business cards suggest that the engineering and geology offices used this mine as their private dump and all the daily mine reports that weren't needed on a long term basis were thrown away here. Equipment manuals for pumps, compressors, hoists and associated mining gear were also part of the Consolidated trash.

Many personal things were thrown down the shaft as well; unopened letters, postcards, women's periodicals, sewing patterns, sheet music, children's writing lessons, correspondence school lessons. Many women's items were among the discarded items such as shoes, corsets, large fashion hats, invitations to dances and dance cards. The dance cards were particularly noteworthy because they were made for a specific dance, i.e., the Spring dance for the Chuckwalla social organization on a specific date. Inside was a listing of the dances with song titles and signatures of the partner for that dance. Announcements for the Elks club meetings and ceremonies as well the famous Montezuma club were among the more interesting items. As mentioned earlier, there was an abundance of correspondence school literature as well as a school catalog from the Northwestern school of Pharmacy and the School of Dentistry, University of Southern California. Obviously, the people employed by Goldfield Consolidated were educated and ambitious, but they also saw

the writing on the wall, as 1912 was the beginning of the decline of Goldfield mining operations.

While not mining, the citizens of Goldfield were able to pass the time of day with other pleasurable pursuits. Liquor and beer bottles were found in abundance and smoking tins, pouches and other containers were ubiquitous. Schlitz and Budweiser were common brands but also found were Rainier bottles, Pabst and Reno Brewing Company bottles. Perhaps the most unique beer bottle was the one from the Goldfield Consumers Brewing Association, High Grade Beer, with a unique colorful label. Most liquor and wine bottles were from Kentucky or California, whiskey being the most predominant, but surprisingly, the Beefeater gin bottles indicated they were civilized mining men after my own heart, with a weakness for gin and tonics. Every type of smoking modality was represented, pipes, cigars, cigarettes, chewing tobacco and snuff. Along with the smoking items there were containers for products such as Tobacco Boon, a supposed cure for smoking, drinking and other addictions. It was, of course, in cigarette form and contained God knows what.

Political cards and endorsements were a common item, usually small business card size announcements with the parson's name and affiliation and office, sometimes with portraits. Tasker Oddie who was to be the governor and George Nixon who was the congressional senator from Nevada had cards which were discovered, among the other justice of the peace, sheriff and state senator candidates. A couple of political buttons were also uncovered, one of which had Oddie and Nixon's portraits.

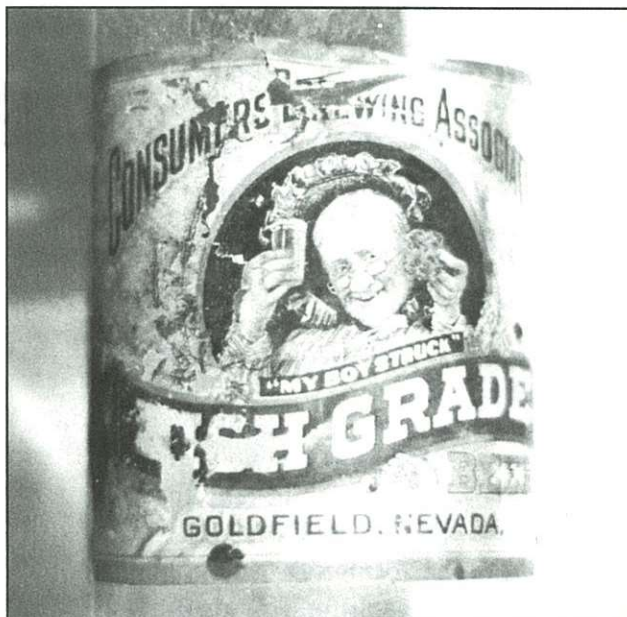


Scott Werschky with High Grade Beer

Evidence of Goldfield's union problems were also discovered among the trash. Handwritten notes describing the mine owners stand against union agitators and their mandate that no member of the I.W.W. or Western Federation of Miners should be employed. A gunny sack was found that contained all the personal belongings of one of the workers including his Western Federation of Miners union membership card and copies of the Socialist Review, a communist magazine of the times. Additionally, an unopened letter from a young student who wrote her Masters thesis on the labor problems of Goldfield was found.

We can tell a lot about people from their trash, as the saying goes and this is no exception. The old mine workings usually are sterile holes in the rock, invaluable for the things that can be scientifically inferred from the structure, alteration and rock type.

This shaft provided a personal glimpse into the life and times of the people who made the hole in the rock one hammer blow at a time. After cleaning up two years worth of trash, I felt a bond with the inhabitants of Goldfield and their garbage that few will ever feel. What kind of people were these? The amount of scientific journals and other management related stationary would suggest that most of the trash came from the office of the engineering and geology section of the Goldfield Consolidated Mining Company. The food cans and bottles could have come from a cafeteria or eating establishment specifically for the management of the Company. The amount and variety of food was exceptional and these people ate well and often. Personal items, social invitations, and letters were obviously from the wives of the workers and there may have been company housing for these workers nearby. One of the most perplexing things was the abundance of work clothes, jeans, jackets, shirts,



Close up of the High Grade Beer

etc. Most of these were in good condition and in such an isolated area, not worth discarding away. I can only think that these were from workers who left quickly or died and the company just discarded their clothing. Candles, pocket knives and other personal items were often found in the pockets. Perhaps these were from union people that the company dismissed hurriedly, or being that this was from a time when the boom was fading, maybe they just took off quickly with no forwarding address. The gunny sack we found with all the personal belongings of a Mr. Dan McGraw certainly points to the possibility of foul play. Personal letters, poems, high school diploma, grades, high school yearbook (1905), photos, maps, Western Federation of Miners union card, and several issues of the International So-

cialist Review, one which was unopened, legal hand documents, were all found together. These were things that most people would have kept even if they were leaving in a hurry. Mr. McGraw's union association was obvious and he may have been kicked out of Goldfield by one of Wingfield's security men in a hasty fashion or even worse.

Many of these Goldfield artifact now grace my shelves and they are truly unique in their own right, but whenever I really think about them I think of the people who used them. These were people involved in what was to them the biggest adventure of their lives, few made the riches they dreamed of, but by the looks of their garbage, they worked hard in a harsh far away place, ate, drank and smoked, and left with enough memories for a lifetime.



Newspapers, jeans and assorted trash hangs down into 'stope' at the one hundred-fifty foot level.